Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5888th meeting

Thursday, 8 May 2008, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Sir John Sawers	(United Kingdom)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Koudougou
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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08-33183 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Lebanon, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Salam (Lebanon) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Envoy for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Roed-Larsen to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Roed-Larsen: The Secretary-General submitted to the Security Council on 21 April his seventh semi-annual report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). In my intervention today, I will focus on the main elements of the report and provide the Council with updates on events since 21 April.

Over the reporting period, Lebanon has continued to experience a severe political crisis, centred particularly on the failure to elect a president of the Republic. The position has remained vacant since 24 November 2007. Despite the sustained efforts of Lebanese, regional and international players, all attempts to elect a new president have not yet yielded results. The electoral void has fueled political polarization and impeded the normal functioning of the legitimate constitutional institutions of the country, in particular the Government and the Parliament. It has also contributed to violent and dangerous confrontations between the opposing parties, leading to casualties.

Since the release of the report, several new incidents have taken place. On 20 April, two followers of the Phalange party were killed and two wounded in the city of Zahle. On 5 May, five people were wounded by gunfire in separate overnight clashes between supporters of the majority and the opposition in Beirut and elsewhere in the country.

Early on 7 May, Hizbollah-led demonstrators blocked the principal highway and other roads leading to Beirut's international airport, port and commercial centre with burning tires and large mounds of earth. Soon afterwards, scuffles broke out between pro-Government and opposition supporters in the Beirut neighbourhood of Corniche al-Mazraa. During that incident, a hand grenade was thrown into the crowd, injuring five people, including two Lebanese army officers. The General Labour Confederation abandoned its call for a general strike originally scheduled for that day. An escalation then ensued, involving the targeting of some political party offices by gunfire and heavy exchanges of fire between pro-Government and opposition groups in several areas of Beirut and its environs. A rocket-propelled grenade hit an office of the Future Party in Beirut.

On the evening of 7 May, Future Party supporters blocked the main road between the towns of Baalbeck and Chtura in the Bekaa valley and the Masnaa road leading to the Lebanese border with Syria. A number of armed clashes also took place in the Bekaa valley. In Beirut, heavy exchanges of fire were reported around the national stadium adjacent to the airport road.

Today, a very tense calm has returned to the capital. However, several roads remain closed. Demonstrations have spread throughout towns and

along main roads in the Bekaa valley. Roads are being blocked and tires burned. The mass of today's armed exchanges have centred on various locations in the Bekaa valley. Future Party supporters have also blocked sections of the main highway that runs North-South along Lebanon's coast. Access to Beirut international airport remains restricted due to the ongoing roadblocks by Hizbollah. The opposition has stated that those measures will remain in place until the cabinet decision of 6 May is reversed.

So far this morning, we have received reports of two fatalities and 10 injuries.

The United Nations has remained in close touch with both sides in an effort to reduce tensions. We remain gravely concerned about the potential for a further escalation of the situation. Several capitals in the region and beyond have made public calls for an end to the clashes. The Secretary-General urges all parties to cease immediately the riots and to reopen all roads in the country. The tense political climate has constituted a significant obstacle towards the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

In that context, the construed existence of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and allegations of widespread rearming and paramilitary training across the political spectrum constitutes a major challenge for the Government of Lebanon. It challenges its authority throughout Lebanon and is a threat to the country's stability.

Hizbollah, the most significant Lebanese militia, maintains a massive paramilitary infrastructure separate from the State. That has an adverse effect on the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to enjoy the monopoly on the use of force and to impose law and order in the country. It also constitutes a threat to regional peace and security. It is worrisome to note that militants of Hizbollah were carrying weapons in populated areas in the context of the recent clashes.

On 26 April, a French delegate to a Socialist International meeting in Beirut was stopped and questioned for more than five hours by Hizbollah in South Beirut as he was taking pictures on the road leading to Beirut airport. Hizbollah justified his detention, saying it was motivated by security concerns.

The Government of Lebanon has informed the United Nations that Hizbollah has developed throughout the country a secure communications network separate from the State's system. According to the Government, that network covers the whole area south of the Litani and the entire Mediterranean coastline up to the border with Syria. It crosses entirely Mount Lebanon from South to North. The network also covers a series of Palestinian camps south of Beirut and in the Bekaa valley. It connects to a Syrian network beyond the border. The Government has deemed the network illegal and said that "it constitutes an attack on the sovereignty of the State". For its part, Hizbollah has claimed that the network is part of its arsenal that should not be harmed.

The Government of Lebanon has disclosed that Hizbollah has established a system of surveillance cameras at Beirut airport. Against that backdrop, the Government of Lebanon decided to remove Brigadier General Wafiq Shoucair from his post as commander of the security of Beirut international airport.

On 7 May, supporters of Hizbollah launched violent protests in Beirut against the Government decisions. In the early afternoon of 8 May, the Higher Shiite Council stated that the solution to the crisis required the Government to change its decision of 6 May.

Those developments give rise to growing fears among the Lebanese that Hizbollah is building parallel institutional structures distinct from and in competition with those of the State. It is believed that this contributes to the erosion of the State's institutions and of its monopoly on the use of force. The United Nations also continues to be deeply concerned by the activities of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah-Intifada, which maintain significant paramilitary infrastructures outside refugee camps and along the border between Lebanon and Syria. These two Palestinian militias are headquartered in Damascus. The Government of Syria bears responsibility for urging these groups to abide by Security Council resolutions and the decisions of the Government of Lebanon, as indicated publicly by Prime Minister Siniora.

Over the reporting period, there has been no discussion among Lebanese political leaders about a political process leading to the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for by the Taif Agreement of 1989 and resolution 1559 (2004).

The Secretary-General once again reiterates his firm conviction that the disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias must take place through a political process that will lead to the full affirmation of the authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout its territory. Such a political process presupposes clear respect for the constitution by all parties. It also presupposes dialogue and a spirit of cooperation and conciliation between various political forces in Lebanon. A return to political dialogue and a resolution of the ongoing political crisis in Lebanon — most notably the issue of the Lebanese presidency —is necessary.

In the meantime, the United Nations is mindful of the regional ramifications of this issue. For that reason, the Secretary-General calls on all those parties that maintain close ties with Hizbollah and have the ability to influence it, in particular Syria and Iran, to support its transformation into a solely political party. The Secretary-General urges it to abide by the decisions of the Security Council and of the Government of Lebanon. This is consistent with the requirements of the Taif Agreement.

The full disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias is in the best interest of regional peace and stability.

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned that a presidential election has still not taken place. A president must be elected in a free and fair electoral process conducted strictly according to Lebanese constitutional rules. It should take place without any foreign interference or influence, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004), without delay, as the continuing electoral void puts in jeopardy the delicate architecture that constitutes the Lebanese State. Such an election would also help revive the ordinary and constitutional political process in Lebanon, in particular the convening of parliament, which has been paralyzed since November 2006. The Secretary-General is disappointed that the repeated calls of the Lebanese people and the international community for an election have not been heeded.

At the same time, the Secretary-General remains mindful of the negative role played by external forces. These have intermingled with Lebanese internal dynamics. They have contributed to the political stalemate in the country. Such foreign interference is in violation of Security Council resolutions.

On 29 and 30 March 2008, the Arab League summit took place in Damascus in a tense atmosphere, as Lebanon remained in the grip of a political crisis and still had not elected a president. In its final communiqué, the Arab Leaders urged "Lebanon's leaders to accomplish the election of consensus candidate General Sleiman, on the set schedule and agree on the basis for the formation of a national unity government as soon as possible". The statement also emphasized "placing Lebanese-Syrian relations on the proper track in line with interests of both States, and assigning the Arab League Secretary General to start working on achieving this goal". The Secretary-General of the United Nations fully supports these decisions.

In the context of the prolonged electoral void, representatives of Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Secretary General of the Council of the European Union, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the acting Foreign Minister of Lebanon met in Kuwait on 22 April 2008. They expressed strong support to the legitimate Lebanese Government and deep dismay at the ongoing political stalemate. They called for the immediate election of the consensus candidate, General Sleiman, as president without prior conditions. They also called for the establishment of a national unity Government and the holding of general elections in conformity with an electoral law agreed by all parties, in accordance with the Arab League plan.

They further called on all parties inside and outside Lebanon to respect Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. They urged Syria and Lebanon to redefine and normalize their ties in mutual respect for their sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence as called for by resolution 1680 (2006).

They stated that the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, the delineation of their shared border and a commitment not to permit the use of their respective territories to destabilize the other would constitute significant steps to secure peace and stability in the region.

Over the reporting period, the Secretary-General has continued his efforts to encourage the initiation of a process between Lebanon and Syria that would eventually lead to the establishment of full diplomatic

relations. This would be in fulfilment of the relevant provisions of resolution 1680 (2006). The Secretary-General has also promoted the timely implementation of tangible measures towards the delineation of the border between Syria and Lebanon.

Such progress would also be significantly helpful for the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General in relation to his work on the issue of the Shaba'a farms area and Prime Minister's Siniora seven-point plan. Regrettably, there has been no progress to date on these matters. The Secretary-General commends the call by Prime Minister Siniora for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon and the delineation of their common borders. The Secretary-General expects the full cooperation of Syria to that end. It will be in the best interest of the stability of the region.

Over the reporting period, Lebanese territorial integrity has continued to be regularly violated by Israeli aircraft flying into Lebanese airspace. The Government of Israel has continued to claim that this is carried out for security reasons. The Secretary-General and his representatives have regularly continued to reiterate the concern of the United Nations and to call on Israel to cease these violations of Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, Israel continues to occupy the northern part of Ghajar, which constitutes a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty. The Secretary-General will report on these matters in more details to the Council in his next report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

The prolonged political and security crisis in Lebanon illustrates that the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) remain as relevant now as they were when the resolution was adopted. I regret to inform the Council that over the last six months there has been no tangible progress towards the implementation of the resolution. To the contrary, the riots that started yesterday in Lebanon tragically illustrate that the country today confronts challenges of a magnitude unseen since the end of the civil war. The electoral void, the stalled functions of parliament and the defiant manoeuvres of militias are all threats to Lebanon's ability to operate as a sovereign, democratic and independent State. These developments can have serious regional repercussions.

As the election of a president has been postponed for the eighteenth time, to 13 May 2008, the Secretary-General urges the parliament to convene on that date to fulfil its constitutional duties.

The Lebanese people now have a unique opportunity to open a new chapter in their difficult history. They and their political representatives must rise to the occasion and elect a president without any conditions beyond those prescribed by the constitution. Such an election would signify a major milestone on the road towards the full reassertion of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence. That is the goal of resolution 1559 (2004).

In that context, the Secretary-General commends and supports the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Amre Moussa, to help the Lebanese bridge their differences and put an end to the electoral void. All concerned States and parties must cooperate urgently with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for the immediate implementation of the Arab Plan.

It is also imperative, three years after Syria's military withdrawal from Lebanon, to normalize relations between Syria and Lebanon. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora has extended an outstretched hand to Syria to address and resolve their bilateral differences. The Secretary-General calls on Syria to accept this offer, consistent with the commitment he received in Damascus from President Al-Assad in April 2007.

Finally, a return to political dialogue among the Lebanese parties through Lebanese constitutional institutions is imperative and is the only way to resolve all outstanding issues. This concerns first and foremost the election of a new president and the resumption of normal activities by parliament. Lebanon must preserve its comprehensive and, most importantly, conciliatory political framework, as set out in the Taif Agreement. In the meantime, the United Nations is mindful that Lebanon has remained a battleground for actors seeking to destabilize the region for their own benefit and to further their own aspirations of dominance. It is time for the Lebanese people and their political representatives alone to determine the fate of Lebanon.

Let me reassure the Council that the Secretary-General stands firmly beside the legitimate Lebanese Government and the people of Lebanon in their quest to recover their sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity. He remains

strongly committed for to the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006).

The President: I have no other speakers inscribed on my list. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.